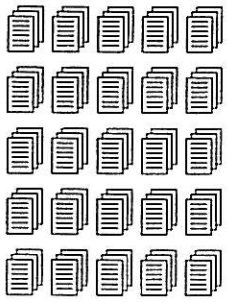
SELECTING AN OFF-SITE RECORDS FACILITY



The last five decades have seen immense growth in the development and activity of government agencies. More records have been created within the last 50 years of government activity than had been generated in the preceding 150 years. This records explosion has strained both the financial and physical resources of all government agencies responsible for maintaining public records.

Records with infrequent reference use need not be housed within the agency office and can be moved to an off-site storage facility. Permanent records may be kept at minimal cost in an off-site, centrally located facility with adequate personnel assigned to maintain them.

In the past, attics, basements, equipment sheds, and warehouses, as well as old jails or school buildings no longer suitable for human habitation, have been commandeered for records storage. But in such settings, records are often inaccessible for public use and vulnerable to excessive damage from uncontrolled environmental conditions. Custodians of government records are required by law to both maintain and provide access to permanent records.

RECORDS INVENTORY AND RETENTION SCHEDULES

The first step in planning an off-site records center is to identify the series and quantity (in cubic feet) to be transferred to the new center. Using a current inventory, also estimate the volume of records that will be transferred in the future, by adding 30-40% to allow for growth. Specify in your written plans the records series that will occupy this future space. Be careful not to over-estimate the amount of space needed to house records.

A large volume of empty space may seem attractive "temporary" storage for materials incompatible with records storage. Dedicate the building solely to the storage of ***records***. Shared storage with equipment or other materials can compromise the safety and integrity of records.

Consult retention schedules to be certain that records are not kept longer than necessary. Some retention schedules allow for the disposal of paper records when information has been transferred to microfilm. Microfilming records saves space, and can provide security when a copy of the film is stored at the Georgia Department of Archives and History.

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SELECTING THE FACILITY

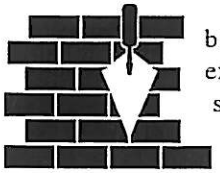
Once the total estimated space needed is known, next select an appropriate building to house the records.

It may be more cost-effective to renovate an existing facility than to build a new one. County governments within Georgia have renovated a jail, a high school, a bank building, and other community buildings to serve as off-site facilities. There are, however, specific criteria to follow when selecting a building to house records.

Location

Locate your off-site storage facility as close to the existing courthouse or current storage area as possible. A close location will facilitate the efficient operation of records retrieval and provide users ready access to both active and inactive records. For the safety of all records, select a building location above the flood plain and away from commercial warehouse storage areas.

The Building



Some renovation will likely be necessary to convert an existing building into a records storage center. A building engineer and/or architect experienced with designing records storage facilities will be a helpful addition to those working on the selection and modification of an existing building. Such individuals can provide valuable assistance in determining the feasibility and cost of renovation.

Consult local fire officials to conduct an initial inspection of the building and provide assistance throughout the renovation process to ensure that all structural changes and systems meet fire codes. Inspect the building for lead and asbestos; discovery of either can significantly increase renovation costs.

Whether new or renovated, the basic building will be a sound, insulated structure with a stable roof, free from leaks. Specify secure doors and as few windows as possible. A loading dock at the rear of the building will facilitate unloading supplies for the renovation, as well as later handling of records. If the building has a basement, be certain that the basement remains dry and that it is also supplied by the building's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system.

Ceiling height will influence the capacity for records storage. Standard high-density shelving for records centers requires a ceiling height of at least 15 feet. Shorter shelving units are also available. A lower ceiling height will reduce the amount of records that can be stored within the square footage of the building.

Compact shelving — shelving where ranges roll on a track fixed to the floor — can significantly increase available space. The cost of compact shelving may not, however, justify the increase in space.

A concrete floor able to support a load of at least 300 pounds per square foot is required, and compact shelving requires even greater support. For this reason, a single story building is preferred.

The concrete floor must be sealed. Use a floor sealant that contains a film-forming resin that is a stable, inert material, such as acrylic, polyester, or a two-component epoxy. Avoid materials that will release unstable vapors over time, such as polyvinyl acetate (PVA) or vinyl-toluated alkyds. Do not use products that contain biocides, formaldehydes, or sulphur-bearing compounds. (These guidelines also apply to painted surfaces such as walls and cabinets.) Allow an ample amount of time for sealants to cure — at least three months. ***Never introduce records into a site which has just been painted or had its floors sealed.***

Carpeting records storage areas is discouraged. Carpeting retains moisture, harbors molds, and is difficult to clean effectively. New carpeting and adhesives outgas chemicals harmful to both staff and records.

Building Systems

Employ a qualified contractor to inspect all wiring systems. Install lighting levels bright enough to enable staff to work without relying on windows for light. Place light fixtures over aisles, *not* over shelving. Select lamps that emit low ultraviolet (UV) radiation, *e.g.*, fewer than 75 microwatts per lumen. High pressure sodium vapor lamps are highly recommended for storage lighting. They contain little UV, do not generate significant heat, and are extremely efficient.

Inspect the plumbing throughout the building for any sign of rust or discoloration on pipes, which may indicate a potential leak. Note the location of any overhead pipes that might pose a potential risk to the records.

A central heating and air conditioning system should remain operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week, maintaining an interior temperature of 68-72° F and a relative humidity between 40 and 45%.

Install a fire detection and suppression system in the building. If the building already has a system in place, be certain that it works. This system will notify the fire department automatically in the event of a fire. Smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and a sprinkler system are necessary to provide a secure records environment.

If the building's basement is intended for records storage, install a water alarm to warn of leaking pipes or incoming ground water. Install the water alarm at the lowest level on the basement floor. Do not assume that the floor drain is the lowest level. Instead, drop a marble or ball bearing on the floor and see where it rolls. In many older buildings, the lowest level on the floor may be a corner.

Fit doors with deadbolt locks. Install intruder alarms on all windows and doors. Alarms should automatically notify local law enforcement of a break-in.

Layout

A public service area will be required if records are to be used on-site. Separate this area from records storage. Assign adequate staff to monitor users and retrieve records. If records are to be used off-site at the courthouse or main records center, design an accurate system to ensure the safe delivery and return of the records.

Allocate space for offices, records processing, and records storage. Allow 100 square feet/person. Laws require restroom facilities on-site. All public areas must meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for wheelchair access. Be certain to provide adequate lighting for work. Locate the offices and processing area within the same structure.

Housing and Shelving

Over the years a variety of paper, metal, and wooden housing systems have been devised to store records. The most efficient means of housing records is in cubic-foot record boxes. These enclosures will protect records from light and dust. When constructed of boxboard that meets the ANSI standard Z39.48-1992 for permanence, these boxes also create a beneficial micro-environment for records storage.

Metal shelving that has been painted using a "powder-coating" method is recommended for records storage. All shelving should be rated for records storage loads. Bolt each unit to the floor and brace it at the top to prevent a "domino effect" of toppling stacks.

Arrange stacks so that there are no dead-end aisles. Build shelving units around support columns so that they will not obstruct aisles. Maintain a minimum width of 30" between rows of shelving. Design the most efficient layout possible for the maximum use of space and the security of the records.

COOPERATIVES AND FUNDING

Several counties in Georgia have worked together to build a single off-site facility to house their records. The shared costs and responsibilities have allowed these counties to create a large and efficient facility.

Local historical societies concerned with the preservation of their communities' historical records may be a valuable asset in planning an off-site facility. Members may be able to solicit funds and raise public support for the new facility.

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) provides grant money to local governments to improve records storage conditions. Information about the NHPRC and grant applications is available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.nara.gov/nara/nhprc>, or by phoning 202-501-5610.

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RESPONSIBILITY

The Georgia Records Act, as stated in *Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.)* 50-18-94, requires permanent records to be secured and made available for use. Creating an off-site records facility is a cost-effective means of providing secure access to records. The care that records custodians provide today will mean that future generations of Georgians will have access to the unique history of their communities.

RESOURCES AND PUBLICATIONS

For more information about ***selecting an off-site facility,*** call 404-656-2379 to contact the ***Records Management Program*** of the Georgia Department of Archives and History, a division of the Office of Secretary of State. For additional information about ***building materials and furnishings,*** call 404-656-3554 to contact the ***Conservator*** at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, a division of the Office of Secretary of State.

OTHER RESOURCES

Lull, William P., and Paul Banks.
Conservation Environment Guidelines for Libraries and Archives.
Ottawa: Canadian Council of Archives, 1995.
Telephone: 613-995-0210.

Minnesota Historical Society.
Specification for Wall and Ceiling Paint for Artifact Areas.
St.Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1991.
Telephone: 612-297-3896.
Also available through:
Conservation Online (COOL)
Conservation DistList Archives
<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu> ■

This paper meets the ANSI Z39.48-1992 standard for permanent paper. ∞

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